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ALICE AYCOCK

PHILADELPHIA COLLEGE OF ART

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HISTORY OF A BEAUTIFUL MAY ROSE GARDEN IN THE MONTH OF JANUARY

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HISTORY OF A BEAUTIFUL MAY ROSE GARDEN IN THE MONTH OF JANUARY.

*Part 1: The Ascension Scene (Weapons) in which there appears a huge funnel shaped pit situated beneath the Northern Hemisphere and running down to the center of the Earth.*

*Part 2: The Coronation Scene (Planets) in which there can be found a Book of Knowledge of Mechanical Devices as illustrated by the Elephant Clock.*

ALICE AYCOCK

SEPTEMBER 22–OCTOBER 7, 1978

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PROJECTS FOR PCA

PHILADELPHIA COLLEGE OF ART

PROJECTS FOR PCA

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Philadelphia College of Art Gallery Staff  
Janet Kardon / Director of Exhibitions  
Paula Marincola / Assistant to the Director  
Gordon Gibfried / Gallery Attendant

## NOTES FOR THE ROSE GARDEN

Ways to get to heaven, ways to climb there, August, 1978

Leaping the chasm at Stond Rock, Wisconsin Dells, 1887

Eunice Winkless's Dive into a Pool of Water, Pueblo, Colorado, July 4, 1905

Wilbur Wright's Glider Test Flight, Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, October 11, 1902

The Angel in the Red Dress Returning to the Center on a Yellow Cloud Above a Group of Swineherds, Sienna c. 1406–1481

Alice Aycock

Alice Aycock has been producing quasi-architectural off-spring since 1972. Her earliest structure, *Maze*, 1972, a multi-cursal wood labyrinth, elicited its quota of decisions from the spectator. Her discussion of the piece refers to the labyrinth of Minos on Crete, thus placing it in an historical continuum. A year later she built *Low Building with Dirt Roof*, so "low" one was forced to crawl through it. These physical and psychological burdens for the spectator — directional decisions and unnatural postures — have remained constant dimensions. Her work since 1973 progressively added physical demands, expected more from the viewer's imagination, and insistently extended its historical references. Now the participatory element has been removed; her recent pieces have become armatures for imaginary, mystical and historical journeys.

The arcane title of Aycock's project for the Philadelphia College of Art gallery indicates the conceptual terrain to be traversed by the viewer:

*History of a Beautiful May Rose Garden in the Month of January.*

*Part 1: The Ascension Scene (Weapons) in which there appears a huge funnel shaped pit situated beneath the Northern Hemisphere and running down to the center of the Earth.*

*Part 2: The Coronation Scene (Planets) in which there can be found a Book of Knowledge of Mechanical Devices as illustrated by the Elephant Clock.*

Found in the Rose Garden were a boat, houses, staircases and corridors, dispersed among five separate structures built with unfinished construction grade lumber strips and plywood. The route around the structures was labyrinthine. Though each part might have been arranged in the gallery by a constructivist cartographer, there were many architectural quotations from pre-Christian and Medieval structures and contemporary vernacular houses.

On entering the gallery the most prominent element was the "elephant clock," a paraphrase of a windmill, ceiling high and crowned at each of its eight spokes with small pitched-roofed dwellings. Yet at the center, a square of ladders, recurrent images in Aycock's vocabulary, and one by six upright planks set on the floor of the gallery hindered any possible revolution. This was the only one of the five parts that was "grounded." All the others were raised at various heights from the floor by attenuated "saw-horses."

Behind the clock, and parallel to the long axis of the gallery, a horizontal corridor extended almost the length of the space, floating on saw-horses above the floor at eye-level. The single access into the five structures was at one end of this corridor. Here the spectator stood under a pitched roof enclosure recalling the roof type of pharaohs' dwellings within Egyptian pyramids. From this vantage point, a long tunnel vista through the corridor "framed" the blank gallery wall. At that end the horizontal passage was bridged by a staircase, the first step of which was five feet above the floor; the last step touched the ceiling. Even if one could levitate, entry would be barred by a small ladder blocking the first step and extending to the ceiling. The exterior was decorated with what Aycock referred to as an "upside down roiling" — vertical strips of wood which marched down the length of the passageway.

The third structure, an inclined half-enclosed staircase, was set behind the passageway. The first step was eight feet from the floor; again, the last collided with the ceiling. This staircase was raised from the floor by supports that were not visible from the gallery entry; from there the staircase appeared to be floating in mid-air.

Similar "legs" supported a seven and a half foot wide boat in the left corner of the gallery. The hull of the semi-circular boat contained two miniaturized facing staircases enclosing an inverted ziggurat of space. It was tilted on its axis, as if to surmount a wave.

The final structure to the right of the gallery entrance was an inclined covered chute, the floor of which was marked by parallel ladder risers. In a lecture given at the college during her residence, Aycock showed a slide of the interior of a pyramid passage with a similar architectural detail. Only a crouching person could maneuver passage in the pyramid, but even this kind of difficult access was denied the spectator of the Rose Garden.

In *Project Entitled "The Beginnings of a Complex . . . "* for Documenta VI, 1977, free-standing facades appeared to be refugees from a stage or movie set, rather than the remaining sides of an actual building, and the spectator was free to devise his own strategies for entry. Now that one is no longer invited to inhabit the set, the spectator's surrogate has to be a limber conceptual performer, with an ability to expand or shrink, contradict laws of gravity, and adapt to palimpsests of different time frames. The corridors of the Rose Garden demanded a reptilian crawl or flotation in mid-air in a floorless hallway. The staircases presented the greatest paradox. While the risers were common house size, their proximity to the ceiling would make passage impossible; yet if a figmentary self were small enough to stand under the ceiling, one's legs would not be long enough to climb the steps.

To “stage” is to construct artifice, which magically restores fragments of history. The wanderer in the *Rose Garden* was prompted by an eclectic “bricoleur’s” gathering of architectural notations from the history of buildings. One suspects that Aycock’s historical derivations are especially selected for their bilingual messages. *Rose Garden*’s enchantment came about because of an overlay of blatant raw materials and simple construction methods on an amorphic Borgesian structure. Borges writes, “It is enough to recall or to mention subsequent events, in as few words as possible; that concave basin which is the collective memory will furnish the wherewithal to enrich or amplify them.”<sup>1</sup>

All the structures of the *Rose Garden*, with the exception of the “elephant clock,” hovered at various heights between the floor and the ceiling, following the conventions of medieval manuscripts where figures floated randomly on the page. This physical suspension connoted a religious state, related to the malleable conceptual skeleton of the *Rose Garden*, where ideas shifted in and out of focus to eventually remain in limbo. While constructing the piece Aycock often described the corridors and stairways as accesses to heaven. But if heaven is the destination, it is to be reached by a series of shrewd, child-like fantasies.

*Rose Garden* had a light-hearted aura of whimsy, even if it was heavily bound by conflicting fantasies. Decorative elements contributed to this ambiance. Drawn from “carpenter gothic” details of the American wood house or shanty were wood rounds of varying diameters and rays of wood strips atop each of the pitched roofs. Ornament is relatively new for Aycock; it has no functional counterpart like the windows, ladders and wheels in earlier works. It first appeared, still guised as lifting devices, in “*The Sign on the Door Read the Sign on the Door . . .*,” 1978. In an untitled work for the Venice Biennale, 1978, a minaturized echo of a Romanesque cathedral was perched on the roof of a shed which housed four large wheels. The *Rose Garden* is the first example of the application of decorative elements that,

despite an historical reference to the American shanty, read primarily as sheer ornamentation.

The dimension of perambulation identifies her work as seventies sculpture, even if part of the journey is imaginary. In this sense her work relates to that of Siah Armajani, Patrick Ireland, Robert Irwin, and George Trakas — other artists in the *Projects for PCA* series whose work must be physically traversed to be experienced. In a recent exhibition at the Art Gallery of Toronto this genre was entitled “Structures for Behavior”. Roald Nasgaard, the curator of that exhibition, writes, “Increasingly the experience of the new sculptures has become centered in the body of the perceiver, who for extended time undergoes the sensation of being suspended in the act of perceiving and transparent to its process and texture.”<sup>2</sup>

Aycock, like Mary Miss and Trakas, adds to the inventory of sculpture techniques. The carpenter’s trade is added to modeling, carving, casting, welding and manufacturing. The artist irreverently chooses to become an artisan. The tools, devices, and materials of carpentry produce structures that resemble the skeletons of vernacular buildings — still “in process.” Surfaces relentlessly present the wood itself, undressed and without “finish.”

The only requirement for the abodes Aycock creates is that they present an artifice, rather than make a commitment to shelter. Unlike traditional theater, which separated its sets from the audience, her structures are props for imaginary habitation. Like her colleagues already mentioned, she carefully negotiates “content” into post-modern art. With Aycock the esthetic energies of the seventies — conceptual and physical movement as the avatar of sophisticated perceptions — flow through memories of historical structures and vernacular processes.

Janet Kardon

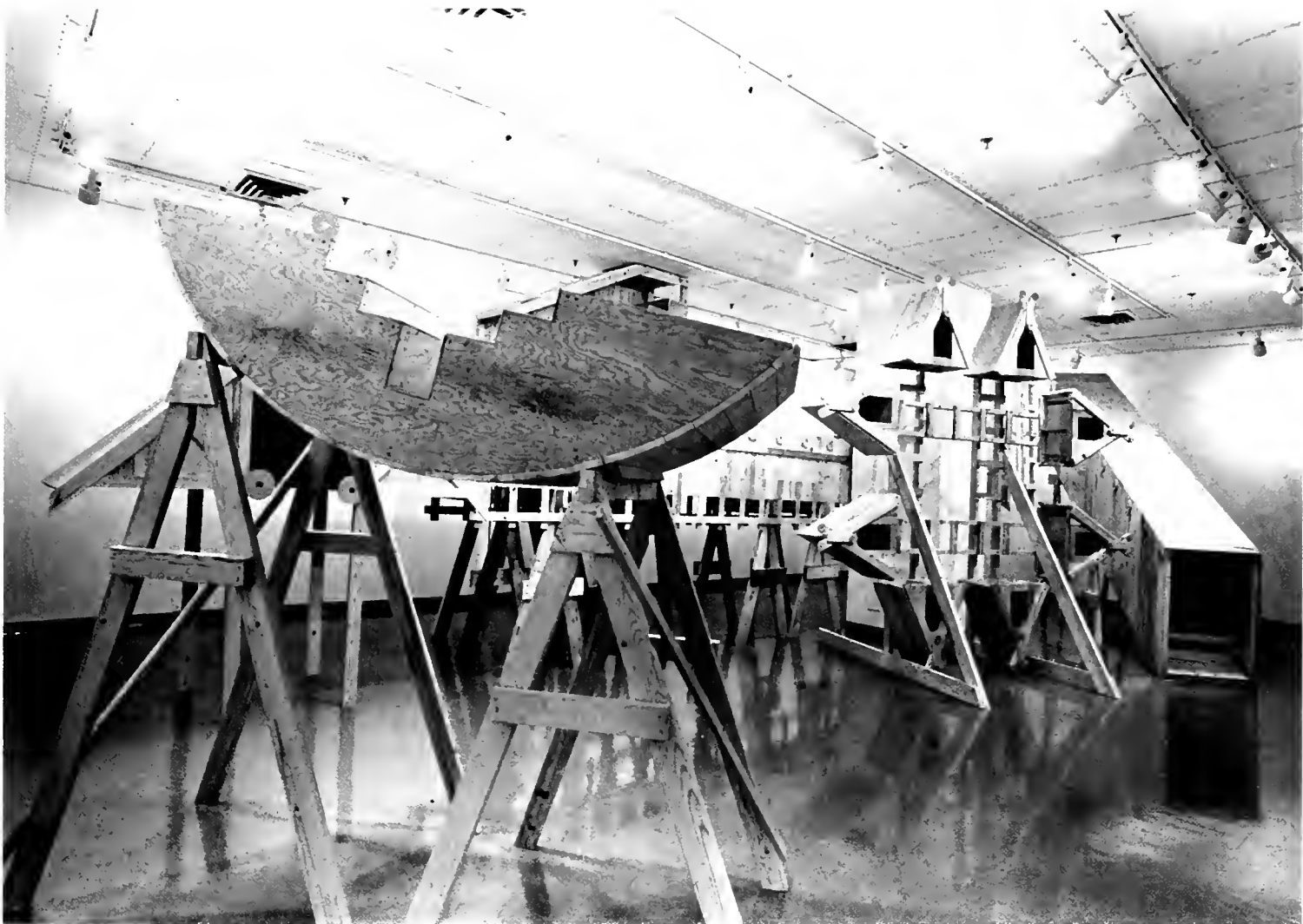
1. Roald Nasgaard, *Structures for Behavior*, Exhibition catalogue, Art Gallery of Ontario, Ontario, Canada, 1978, p. 37.

2. Jorge Luis Borges, “Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,” *Ficciones*, Grove Press Inc., New York City, New York, 1962, p. 33.

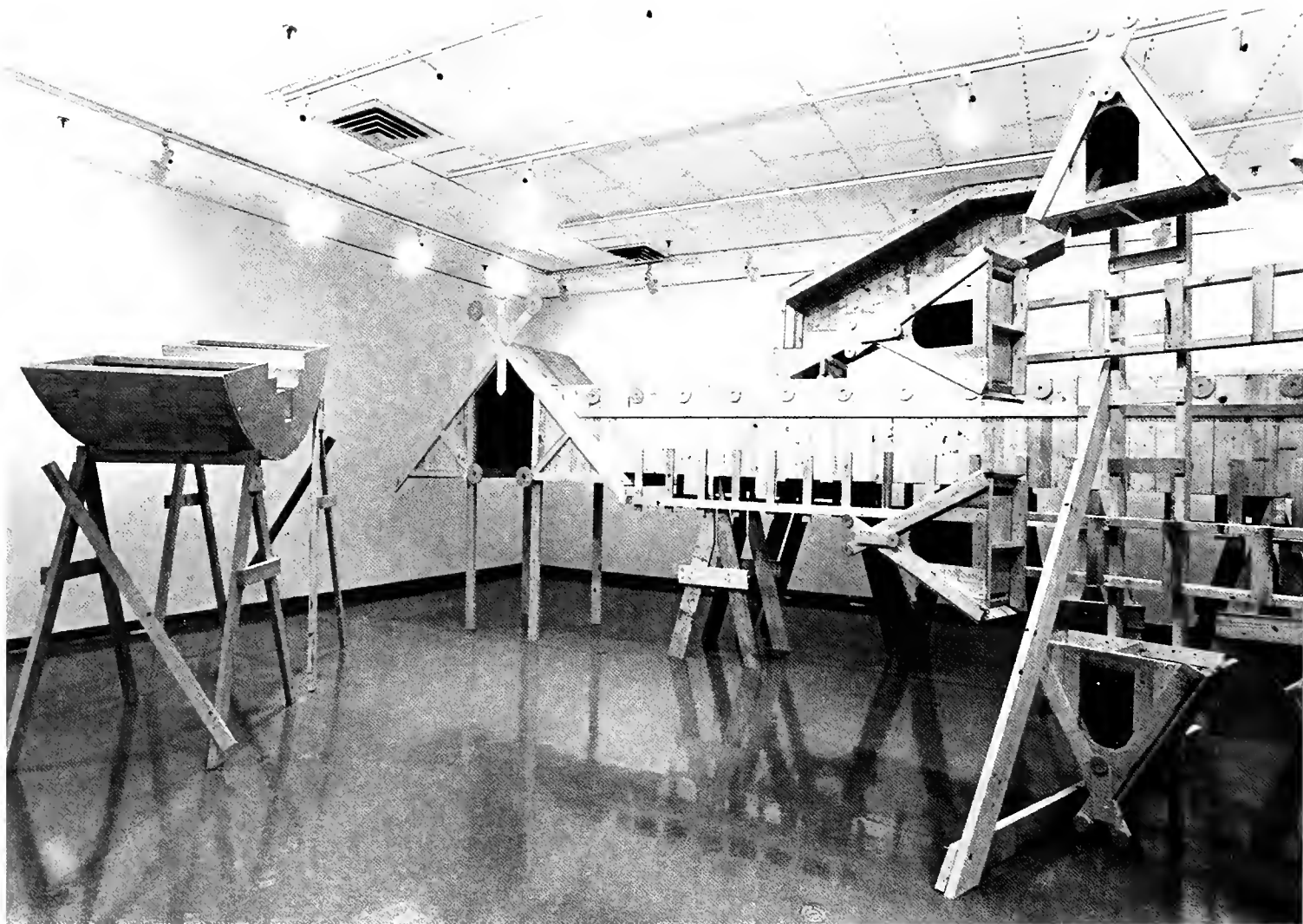


HISTORY OF A BEAUTIFUL MAY ROSE GARDEN IN THE MONTH OF JANUARY,  
1978 PRELIMINARY DRAWING PENCIL ON VELLUM 24" X 68"





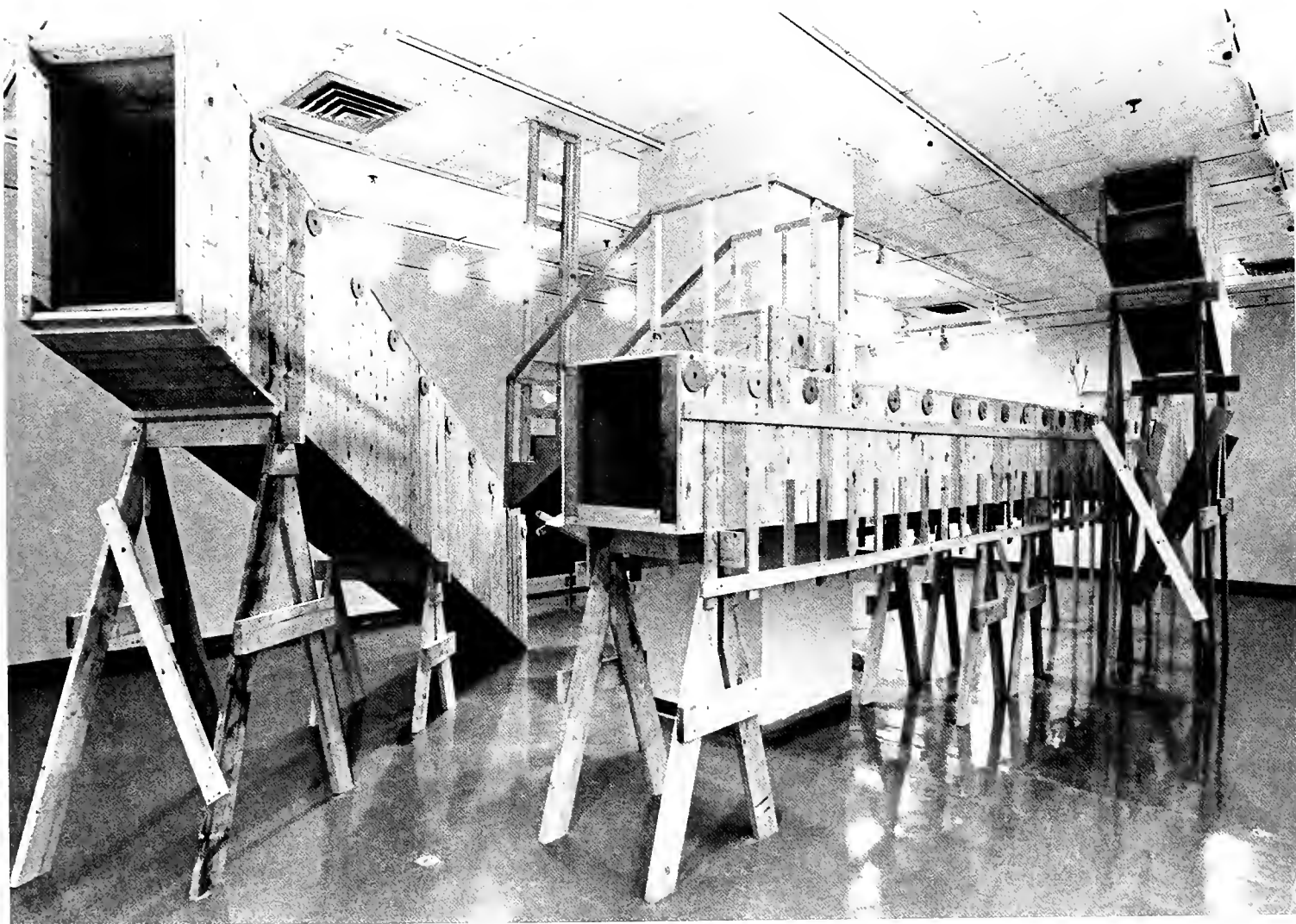
HISTORY OF A BEAUTIFUL MAY ROSE GARDEN IN THE MONTH OF JANUARY,  
1978 WOOD 12' x 45' x 27'5" VIEW FACING SOUTHWEST



VIEW FACING SOUTHEAST



VIEW FROM ENTRY DOOR, FACING SOUTH



VIEW FACING NORTHEAST



DETAIL OF CHUTE, FACING SOUTHWEST

## ALICE AYCOCK

Born in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 1946  
Lives and works in New York City

## EDUCATION

Douglass College, New Brunswick, New Jersey, B.A., 1968  
Hunter College, New York City, New York, M.A., 1971

## SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

Listings are chronological and include catalogues. One- person exhibitions precede group exhibitions.  
Collated by Paula Marincola

1970

*Sand #1*

Artist's studio, New York City, New York  
Air, industrial fan, sand, weathervane

1971

*Sun/Glass*

Fry Farm, Silver Springs, Pennsylvania Glass  
"Clay #1," 26 Contemporary Women Artists  
Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut  
Clay, plywood, water  
Catalogue with text by Lucy R. Lippard  
"Sand #2," *Untitled* group exhibition  
112 Greene Street, New York City, New York  
Air, industrial fans, sand, weathervane

1972

*Maze*

Gibney Farm, New Kingston, Pennsylvania  
Wood  
*Untitled V*

Museum of Modern Art, Penthouse Gallery, New York City, New York  
*Communications*  
Inhibodress Gallery, Sydney, Australia

1973

*Low Building with Dirt Roof*

Gibney Farm, New Kingston, Pennsylvania  
Earth, fieldstone, wood

*Artlift 549*

Women's Interart Center, New York City, New York  
*Conceptual Art*  
Women's Interart Center, New York City, New York

1973-1974

*Stairs (These Stairs Can Be Climbed)*

112 Greene Street, New York City, New York  
Wood

1974

*Walled Trench/Earth Platform/Center Pit*

Gibney Farm, New Kingston, Pennsylvania  
Concrete block, earth

*Williams College Project*

Williams College, Williamstown, Massachusetts  
Concrete block, earth, wood

*C.7500*

California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, California.  
Also shown at Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut; Moore College of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Massachusetts; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota; Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Massachusetts; 48 Earlham Street, Covent Garden, London, England; A.I.R. Gallery, New York City, New York; and/or Gallery, Seattle, Washington, 1974  
Catalogue with text by Lucy R. Lippard and notes by the artists

*Interventions in Landscape*

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge,  
Massachusetts

*Projekt '74*

Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne, Germany  
Catalogue with text by Evelyn Weiss

1975

*Sense of Reference*

Mandeville Center for the Arts, University of California at  
San Diego, La Jolla, California  
Catalogue with artists' statements

*2 Artists*

Walters Hall Art Gallery, Douglass College, New  
Brunswick, New Jersey

*Biennale de Paris*

Museum of Modern Art, Paris, France  
Catalogue with text by Evelyn Weiss

*"A Simple Network of Underground Wells and Tunnels,"*

*Projects in Nature*

Merriewold West, Far Hills, New Jersey  
Concrete, earth  
Catalogue with introduction by Edward Fry and artist's  
statement

*Labyrinth*

Watson Gallery, Wheaton College, Norton, Massachusetts  
Also shown at Philadelphia College of Art, Philadelphia,  
Pennsylvania, 1975; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington  
D.C., 1976

Catalogue with texts by Ronald J. Onorato and Alice T.  
Friedman. Catalogue for Philadelphia College of Art with  
text by Janet Kardon

*"Scaffolding," Untitled group exhibition*

112 Greene Street, New York City, New York  
Wood

1976

*Alice Aycock Projects: Plans And Specifications*

Watson Gallery, Wheaton College, Norton, Massachusetts

*"Wooden Posts Surrounded by Fire Pits," Sculpture Sited*  
Nassau County Museum of Fine Arts, Roslyn, New York  
Concrete block, fire, wood

*"Heavy Roofed Building," 2 Artists*  
Otis Art Institute, Los Angeles, California  
Concrete, earth

*"Wooden Shacks on Stilts with Platform," Installations*  
Hartford Art School, University of Hartford, West Hartford,  
Connecticut  
Wood

*4 Artists*

Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, Massa-  
chusetts  
Catalogue with text by Michael Klein

*Small Masterworks*

Rosa Esman Gallery, New York City, New York

*1976 Invitational*

John Weber Gallery, New York City, New York

1977

*The True and the False Project Entitled "The World Is So Full  
of a Number of Things"*

112 Greene Street, New York City, New York  
Sheetrock, wood

*Project Entitled, "Studies For A Town"*

The Museum of Modern Art, New York City, New York  
Wood

*10 American Artists of the 1970s*

Muhlenberg Center for the Arts, Allentown, Pennsylvania  
Catalogue with introduction by Monroe Denton

*"Project Entitled 'The Beginnings of a Complex . . .',"*  
*Documenta VI*

Kassel, Germany  
Concrete, wood

Catalogue includes text on Alice Aycock by Nancy D.  
Rosen and artist's statement

*"Project Entitled 'The Beginnings of a Complex . . .': Excerpt*

Shaft #4/Five Walls', " Artpark  
 Lewiston, New York  
 Wood  
 Catalogue with text by Nancy D. Rosen and artist's statement  
 "The Twentieth Floor — A Series of Twenty-one Walls,"  
*Metaphor and Illusion*  
 The First National Bank Building, Dayton, Ohio, Wright  
 State University, Dayton, Ohio in conjunction with the city  
 of Dayton  
 Sheetrock, wood  
 Catalogue with text by Paul Wick  
*Drawings for Outdoor Sculpture: 1946-1977*  
 John Weber Gallery, New York City, New York  
 Also shown at Amherst College, Amherst Massachusetts;  
 Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Mas-  
 sachusetts; University of California at Santa Barbara, San-  
 ta Barbara, California, 1978  
 Catalogue with text by David Shapiro  
 1978  
 Alice Aycock  
 John Weber Gallery, New York City, New York  
 Project Entitled "A Precarious Method for Attacking an Enemy  
 Fortress. . ."  
 Portland Center for the Visual Arts, Portland, Oregon  
 Sheetrock, wood  
 "The Sign on the Door Read the Sign on the Door,"  
 University of Rhode Island, Kingston, Rhode Island  
 Wood  
 Project Entitled "On the Eve of the Industrial Revolution. . ."  
 Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan  
 Wood  
 The Angels Continue Turning the Wheels of the Universe  
 Despite Their Ugly Souls: Part I  
 Gallery Salvatore Ala, Milan, Italy  
 Wood  
 The Happy Birthday Day Coronation Piece  
 Muhlenberg Center for the Arts, Allentown, Pennsylvania  
 Sheetrock, wood

Catalogue with texts by Monroe Denton, Edward Fry, and  
 Stuart Morgan. Acknowledgments by Alice Aycock  
 Recent Works  
 John Weber Gallery, New York City, New York  
 "Untitled," *From Nature to Art, from Art to Nature. Six sta-  
 tions for artnature. The nature of art, La Biennale di  
 Venezia*  
 Venice, Italy  
 Wood  
 Catalogue with texts by Jean Christophe Ammann, Achille  
 Bonito Oliva, Antonio Del Guercio, Filiberto Manna  
 "The Angels Continue Turning the Wheels of the Universe:  
 Part II," *Made By Sculptors*  
 Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Holland  
 Wood  
 Catalogue with texts by Rini Dippel and Geert Van  
 Beijeren  
 Architectural Analogues  
 Downtown Branch, Whitney Museum of American Art,  
 New York City, New York  
 Catalogue with text by Lisa Phillips  
 "Untitled House from Venice," *Dwellings*  
 Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania,  
 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
 Wood  
 Catalogue with text by Lucy R. Lippard  
 Beyond the Canvas . . . *Artists' Books and Notations*  
 Touchstone Gallery, New York City, New York

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 66-67.  
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- Perreault, John, "Art: Women in the News," *Village Voice*, April 29, 1971.
- Rosen, Nancy D., "A Sense of Place," *Studio International*, March/April 1977, pp. 115-121.
- Shapiro, David, "A View of Kassel," *Artforum*, September 1977, p. 56.
- Sheffield, Margaret, "Alice Aycock: Mystery Under Construction," *Artforum*, September 1977, pp. 63-65.
- Siegel, Jeanne, "Notes on the State of Outdoor Sculpture at Documenta VI," *Arts Magazine*, November 1977, p. 130.
- Smith, Roberta, "Reviews," *Artforum*, September 1974, p. 71.

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- Wooster, Ann-Sargent, "Reviews: New York," *Artforum*, February 1976, p. 62.

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- \_\_\_\_\_, "New York City Orientations," *Triquarterly* 32, Winter 1975.
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